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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, August 11, 1932

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Cooking Language." Information approved the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

Do you remember the story about the bride who was making her first cake? A friendly neighbor came in and found her studying her cookbook. On the table before her was a row of eggs carefully placed about a foot apart.

The puzzled bride explained, "This recipe says to separate the eggs. Well, I've done that, you see, but I don't know what to do with them now they're separated."

Beginner's blunders are amusing enough to every old-timer at the business of cooking. But put yourself in the place of the bride who has never done any cooking before, who didn't "grow up in the kitchen" as housekeepers used to do. Imagine reading a cookbook for the first time and trying to follow its directions.

A young housekeeper told me recently that what she needed most was a cooking dictionary.

"All those funny terms in my cookbook are just Greek to me", she said.

"What funny terms?" I inquired.

"Well, take a cake recipe, for example. It's just full of funny ways of telling you to do things. I haven't an idea what it means. First, the directions says to cream the fat. Then, they say to separate the eggs. Over here on the next page you read, 'Fold in the whites of eggs.' And finally this recipe says to dust the pans with flour. Now I ask you, wouldn't any beginner be puzzled by those words?"

"Now you mention it, probably they are confusing. But most of us have known those expressions all our lives."

"That's all very well for the lucky girl who has a chance to learn cooking at home before she goes to housekeeping for herself. But how about wives like me who have spent out days in an office instead of the kitchen? And look here, Aunt Sammy, now we're on the subject, would you mind if I asked you the meaning of some more of these cooking terms? How do you cut in the shortening when you're making pie crust? How do you trim a pie crust or line a pie pan? What does a recipe mean when it says to coat food with flour? How do you toss a salad? And--"

"Please," I said, "please stop until I get my breath. All those questions at once. How can I answer them at such a rate?"

"Why not answer them tomorrow when you give your radio chat? I'll bet a lot of your radio friends, especially beginners like me, would like to hear just how expert cooks carry out these cookbook directions."

So here I am this morning, ready to be a walking and talking dictionary and discuss some of those words that puzzled my young friend. Let's talk over, as we go, the quickest, best and easiest way to do these little cooking jobs.

Let's see. The first puzzling word my friend mentioned was "creaming", which she found in her cake recipe. Creaming is softening any kind of fat by pressing it against the sides of a mixing bowl with the back of a spoon and by stirring it until it has the texture of thick cream. Sometimes the recipe says to cream the shortening and the sugar. In that case, you soften the shortening first and then add the sugar and mix it in. A perforated wooden spoon is the best tool for creaming.

How do you cream butter? First allow the butter to become soft in a warm room. Then rub it with the back of a wooden spoon until it is smooth and creamy.

Most housekeepers, even beginners, know that the expression "separating eggs" means separating the yolk of the egg from the white. Most housekeepers know the trick of breaking the egg and dividing these two parts. But for the bewildered bride, let me describe the way experienced cooks do it. First, they have ready one large bowl and two small ones. The large bowl, of course, is for the egg whites which expand when they are whipped. Crack the shell by hitting the egg about midway on its side on the edge of the bowl. Now hold the egg in an upright position over a small bowl. Open the shell. The yolk will settle to the bottom half and most of the white will flow over into the small bowl. Now turn the yolk into the other half of the shell so that the remainder of the white will be released. Then drop the yolk into the second small bowl. Pour the white into the large bowl. Repeat the process with the next egg. This process takes a long time to describe, but actually it's all done in a twinkling.

The next question is about "folding in" the egg whites. Folding is a gentle method of putting egg whites into a mixture without destroying their lightness. You pour the beaten egg whites on top of the mixture. Then, instead of beating them in, you gently pass a whip or spoon down through both egg whites and mixture, bring up some of the mixture and place it on top. Repeat the process until both are blended. This folding-in process is also often used with whipped cream.

Now the whys and how of "dusting" a pan with flour. You dust flour on a pan to keep the cake from sticking when it is baked. When you have greased the pan evenly, put about a teaspoon of flour in it. Then shake the pan gently from side to side until all the surfaces are coated with a film of flour. Turn the pan upside down and drop out the extra flour. And there you are. Ready to pour in the cake mixture.

So much for the puzzling words in the cake recipe. Now for the pie recipe. First, that expression "cutting in". How do you cut in the shortening when you're making pie and biscuits?

In earlier days when cooks used their hands more and utensils less they usually did this job of mixing the fat and the flour with their finger tips. Nowadays, cooks keep hands and food cleaner by using a knife or pastry blender to do this job. They actually cut in the shortening until the mixture has a crumb-like consistency.

So much for mixing the pastry. Now, how do you trim it? Arabella inquires whether trimming pie crust has anything to do with decoration. No. Trimming is

just cutting off the extra pie crust around the edge of the pie pan. Of course, you've seen that done. The cook holds the pan on her left hand. With her right hand she holds a knife slantwise underneath the pan and runs the knife around the edge of the pan, taking off, as she goes, any crust hanging over.

By the way, when you line the pie plate with the crust, be sure to left the crust so that there will be no air bubbles underneath. And press it down firmly around the edge before you start to trim it. If you want a high or double edge on your pie, allow enough crust so that you can fold it under on the edge.

There now. Have we discussed all the perplexing words on the list?

Not quite. We still have that expression "to coat with flour" or "to coat with egg and crumbs." Now to coat a food with flour, you put about a half cupful of flour in a shallow dish or on a piece of heavy waxed paper. Stir in half a teaspoonful of salt and a little pepper if you like. Then dip each piece of food to be coated into the flour; and turn it over and over with a fork until all sides are covered. Pieces of meat or fish are often coated with flour before cooking.

Recipes for croquettes and cutlets often give the directions: "coat with egg and crumbs." How to do that? Break an egg into a shallow dish. Beat slightly with a fork until the white and yolk are mixed. Then stir in one tablespoon of water. In a second shallow dish put the dry rolled and sifted bread crumbs. Dip the food into the egg mixture first and turn it until all sides are coated. Then lift it out with a fork. Hold it a minute until the excess egg has drained off. Then dip it into the crumbs and turn it again until it is evenly covered.

Didn't we discuss that expression "tossing the salad" last week or so? It just means lightly turning the salad greens over and over in a big bowl with French dressing until they are evenly coated.

Let's close up the dictionary for today and answer a question about stoves. By the way, if any of you want any other cookery terms explained, write me and I'll tell you just how the experts explain them.

A home-maker writes that she has a new white enamel range which she has used just a short time. And now brown scorched spots have appeared on the enamel. What causes these scorched places and what can she do to remove them?

Here's what the specialists at the Bureau of Home Economics reply to that question:

"The scorched appearance of the white enamel on your stove is due to the burning of foods, especially of fat, on the surface. Daily washing with soap-suds and an abrasive is the best method of preventing the brown film. You can use something like steel wool to remove the brown places that have already formed.

Friday: "Refrigerator Questions and a Sunday dinner."

